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ON THE CONCEPT OF THE EPHEMERAL
IN BHARTṚHARI'S ŚATAKATRAYAM

Beneath the principal themes suggested by the titles of the three hundreds in Bhartṛhari's celebrated *Śatakatrayam*, there exists an important range of sub-texts which contribute to the sustained critique of central aspects – encapsulated in the terms *pravṛttidharma* and *nivṛttidharma* – of ancient Indian culture which by the poet's time (400 ACE?) had secured the status of tradition¹. One sub-text having direct implications for both of these *dharma*s centres on the subject of epistemology, from which flows directly the question of the ephemeral. Throughout the *Śṛṅgāra* (ŚŚ) and the *Vairāgyaśatakas* (VŚ), in particular, different registers of perception are presented and critiqued. Whilst there is no direct exploration of these, much of it is done most effectively by suggestion, there is considerable exposition of the object of these different forms of perception. The principle aim of this paper is to analyse how the poet Bhartṛhari deals with the theme of "appearance" and the conceptual organisation of reality, themes which in his poems overlap consistently with the idea of the ephemeral and are inseparable from the problem of epistemology. Throughout his poems appearance is often conceptualised as continuous movement, possibly as vibration – though to interpret movement as vibration

1. See G.M. BAILEY, *Bhartṛhari's Critique of Culture*, Melbourne, 1994.

would take him too close to the Kaśmīrī Śaivites whom he precedes by centuries. The eye sees woman as a flash of movement, a snapshot of tremulous activity and the ear hears her as a set of tinkling anklets. At all times what might appear from a distance as a solid surface is ultimately fragile and porous at close range. This perception of different and unstable levels of reality, and the implication it has for differing epistemologies, is of course crucial to most schools of Indian philosophy. Because of its centrality in the intellectual culture of ancient India it should not be surprising that it appears in the poems of so acute a thinker as Bhartṛhari.

The Senses

The problem at hand can only be appreciated if the central role played by the senses and sense objects in Bhartṛhari's poetry is recognised. Bhartṛhari alludes to both repeatedly, especially in the *Śṛṅgāra* and the *Vairāgyaśatakas*, and an understanding of what he means by the senses and their capacity to define a world must be gained before further investigations of his ideas of levels of reality can be ascertained. As an initial statement on the role of the senses in picking up objects of knowledge I cite ŚŚ² 102:

*iha hi madhuraḡītaṃ rūpametad raso 'yam
sphurati parimalo 'sau sparśa eṣa stanānām /
iti hṛtaparamāṛthairindriyair bhrāmyamāṇaḥ
svahitakaraṇadhūrtaiḥ pañcabhir vañcito 'smi //*

Here her mellifluous voice sparkles,
Her beauty shines, her taste thrills,
Her fragrance throbs, the touch of her breasts excites.

2. I have used the editions of D.D. KOSAMBI, ed., *Śatakatrayādi-subhāṣitasamgraha: The Epigrams Attributed to Bhartṛhari*, Bombay, 1948; D.D. KOSAMBI, ed., *Subhāṣitatriṣaṭī*, Bombay, 1957; D.D. KOSAMBI, ed., *Bhartṛhari-śataka-trayam* (with Dhanasāraḡaṇi's commentary), Bombay, 1959; ed. with Rāmaṛṣi's commentary, 1921.

But, made to wander about with my senses deprived of their true objects,
I am deceived by these five rogues who act for their own good.

Two possible objects of knowledge are raised for consideration in this poem: the body of a woman conceptualised as a restricted range of sense objects emphasizing perceptual sensations and the highest spiritual object, the *paramārtha*, which was presumably so well known as not to require elaboration. Both have a metonymic relation to the objects they evoke and successfully bring out the broad ideological distinction – between abnegation of the senses and immersion in sensuality – current in so much ancient Indian literature of what comes to be encapsulated in the *Śṛṅgāra* and the *Vairāgyaśatakas*. Nor is this distinction restricted to Hindu literature. One has to think only of early Pāli literature to appreciate how successful was the image of woman as symbol of the senses (both as functioning organs and as the object of desires) in gaining an almost universal status.

Though the referent of *paramārtha* involves a much higher degree of abstraction than the referent of the figurative description of woman given here, focus of the mind upon the former is implicitly asserted to be the normative condition in which the mind should hold itself. However this is hardly the full story. In dealing specifically with a poet like Bhartṛhari it would be more accurate to say that what is presented is the brāhmaṇical³ culture's assertion of the normative condition in which the mind should hold itself and that the poet's intention is to present it as one alternative in comparison to which the other is a transitory inferior. Such is conveyed for the mind, again metonymically (due to the widespread acceptance, even in non-philosophical circles, of concepts such as *abhimāna* and *ahaṃkāra*), by the verb *asmi*, the last word in the poem. We can regard it as framing an image of the mind as an entity considering itself a fictional unity, fictional because although the grammatical singularity of the verb implies the same for the mind, this singularity is contradicted by what

3. But this must include Buddhism as well. Bhartṛhari's poetry is so attractive because it draws such a wide net, dealing with ideologies encompassing both Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism (see BAILEY, *Bhartṛhari's Critique...*).

the mind must use to manifest and reach outside of itself. All such modes of manifestation, the senses (*pañcabhiḥ*), must violate this unity as they necessarily receive the world as a plurality. Their portrayal in the first two *pādas* of the poem as individual components serves only to fragment perpetually the unity they might assume if they could be collapsed back into an individual “I”. Here the sense of individuality is strengthened semantically by the *sva* in the compound *svahitakaraṇadhūrtaiḥ*. But it is a fragmented individuality, an idea communicated with a brilliant mixture of precision and ambiguity by the verb *sphurati*. It is the verbal referent for all the senses and simultaneously denotes the role of that quality within the five components of the woman that makes her so alluring. Equally, and perhaps unexpected given the consensus amongst Indian philosophical schools that ultimate reality is a unity, that which the deception of the senses has removed is also plural. Yet if we acknowledge that the compound *hṛtaparamāṛthair* is a *bahuvrīhi* dependent upon *indriyair*, it tells us that the decision to render the word for ultimate reality as a plural is a grammatical necessity. Even so it is this fallacy, of taking the unity for multiplicity, that broadly defines one fundamental stream of brāhmaṇical thought from as early as the oldest *Upaniṣads*. Bhartṛhari is both expositing and questioning it here. Where his questioning is most evident is in the implied evaluation that there is a futility in asserting a unified *paramārtha* as the highest goal of endeavour when, in the mental scheme presupposed in this poem, each of the senses receives an object which both defines it in relation to the other senses and effectively removes the fiction of a unified self/mind.

Being confronted with multiple choices and distinct categories within these choices, the mind is presented as having little option but to wander in a world of objects perceived in a limited number of ways. The most powerful of these objects has the capacity to draw it away from something that cannot be perceived through the senses. Moreover, it is not an active participant in this process, the verbal noun in the causative indicating that it is drawn towards the sense objects irrespective of what little volition it might have in this.

From where does this wandering begin? From what static state, or is the mind depicted as being in a state of constant flux? The answer is suggested in the use of the verbal forms found in the third

and fourth *pādas*. They tell us directly of the mind's wandering through the medium of the senses. Omitting *hita*, the three relevant verbal forms are all in the passive, and of these, two are past passive participles implying something static to which they are linked. They advert to the state of the mind as deceived (*vañcita*) – as if transformed from some other condition – and its appropriate object of reflection as drawn away (*hṛta*) whilst it is wandering. For the latter the pertinent verb – *bhrāmyamāṇaḥ* – is a causative form of the present participle in the passive, describing the movement of the mind when it is drawn out from itself by the senses, themselves drawn towards objects in nature, not to the culturally and highly abstract “objects” of the *paramārtha*. Of course, under the influence of the latter, the senses receive a precise cultural encoding by their integration into a system of ideological representations where they will either be devalued, as they are here, valued positively, or left in a state of ambiguity.

It would, in the final analysis, be fallacious to regard the process being described here as having reference to an entity that is entirely static. The image of “being caused to wander” certainly has dynamic resonances as does the participle *hṛta* “taken away”, for even if only negative, it alludes both to the highest object of meditation whilst it is in the (constant) process of being removed under the influence of sense objects, and the senses which are attracted by whatever it is that makes them attractive (*sphurati*). Just as the mind is being caused to wander, the supreme object is being pulled away from it and the gap between them becomes larger. But what fills the gap? It is what provides the principal subject of this paper. That gap is filled by the objects of the senses and whatever we take the meaning of *sphurati* to be. I have translated it in five different ways “sparkles, shines, thrills, throbs and excites” to indicate how it facilitates the entrancing effect of the sense objects. The commentators are not helpful here⁴.

Another poem in the ŚŚ gives fine expression to the virtuosity of whatever *sphurati* denotes, whilst simultaneously drawing us down

4. Rāmacandrabudhendra glosses *raso 'yam with raso ... adharāmṛtaṃ sphurati* and Rāmaṣi gives for *madhuraḡitam*: *etat madhuraṃ manoharaṃ gāṇaṃ varitate iti śrotrendriyeṇa pratāraṇā ... asau parimalaḥ āmodaḥ sphurati prasaratīti ghrāṇendriyeṇa pratāraṇā...*

into the ambiguity – or is it really semantic imprecision (mirroring the imprecision of the reality it denotes)? – that so frequently accompanies the use of this verb.

*tāvadeva kṛtināmapī sphuraty
eṣa nirmalavivekāḍipakāḥ /
yāvadeva na kuraṅgacakṣuṣāṃ
tādyate caṭulalocanāñcalaiḥ // ŚŚ 77*

This clear light of discrimination of the highly skilled
Shines diffusely for just as long as
It is not struck by the tremulous glances
Of the eyes of doe-eyed women.

This poem offers a full gloss on the themes on which we have been reflecting. It conveys obliquely the basic thematic frame in Bhartṛhari's poems, the broad conceptual and practical disjunction between the sensuosity of *kāma* and the austere knowledge normally associated with long periods of renunciation in the forest. Into this frame are inserted many images of movement and temporal transience. Furthermore, the common theme in Bhartṛhari's poetry of the eye as locus of knowledge is present in the dual sense of organ of knowing and object of knowledge.

The temporal dimensions of the two states frame both sets of *dvipādas* and define two different states of consciousness whose separation is artificially exacerbated by the positioning of the temporal articles. *Tāvad* and *yāvad* perform this separating function here and their temporal ambience is made much tighter by the repetition of the emphatic particle *eva* following each one, implying that the initial state of intellectual discrimination is one highly vulnerable to the attacks of sensuous women symbolised by their eyes. Within these discrete temporal units what do we find? In the first we are presented with discriminative knowledge, a strong symbol of the enlightenment quest. The full expression is "light of clear discrimination" and it is a quality of those who are highly skilled or cultivated (*kṛtinām*), its most palpable manifestation being that it is *sphurati*. The root *sphur* can be glossed as "to dart, tremble, throb, quiver, flash, glitter, shine, burst out visibly" and even if we cannot define it precisely it is clear

that it can be used to connote the kind of fragile reality perceptible to the senses, a view of reality we saw conveyed in the previous poem and a reality that can easily be penetrated by discriminative knowledge. It is likely that the imprecision of this root across a range of semantic fields is advantageous here for the evocation of an image which is required to establish meaning on both a more abstract epistemological level and on a striking visual level. The latter is of course strongly reinforced by the inclusion of the word *dīpaka* "lamp, light" in the second *pāda*. It is the source of the gleaming, sparkling light that appears to emanate from those who have become cultivated through the acquisition of spiritual knowledge.

In spite of the positive evaluation which would generally be accorded to the "light of clear discrimination" in the brāhmaṇical ascetic tradition, one strongly foregrounded in Bhartṛhari's poems, there is a questioning of this evaluation here. Though pure and discriminating between the real and the unreal, thus conforming to all the requirements of that liberating knowledge enunciated so repetitiously in the *Upaniṣads*, this knowledge appears to have neither permanence nor solidity. This is the conclusion I draw from the use of the verb *sphurati*. Such knowledge is vulnerable to attack from another source, even if it has been assiduously cultivated. What this source is becomes clear in the second set of *pādas*. Together they would form an almost independent statement if it were not for the inclusion of the temporal particle. The crucial word is the verb *tāḍyate* "struck" (Monier-Williams also gives "to obscure, eclipse" in astronomical texts) employed in the passive, the *karman* of which is the light of discrimination in the second. But a question is left open. What is the effect on the light when it is struck by the curves of the trembling eyes "of doe-eyed women"?

Note that there is no subject in these two *pādas*. It is, of course, carried over from the second *pāda* and is placed here only to be effected by what is described in the second set of *pādas*. The clearest image is of the sharply defined edge of women's eyes and the largeness of the eyes, where the latter is conveyed by the word *kuraṅga*, the sense of both large and vulnerable being obvious in this word. What is striking, and a feature that creates a kind of symmetry with the first *pāda*, is the sustained suggestion of movement in the words

used in this second set of *pādas*. *Kuraṅga* itself, if it comes from the root *kṛī*, could, in addition to its primary meaning, also convey the sense of “to scatter, throw, disperse”, evoking a rough parallel with the root *sphur*. The same sense applies to *caṭula* taken in the meaning of “trembling, shaking” and *añcala* in its derivation from the root *añc* “to bend, curve”, but also “to move, wander, about”. These certainly suggest the image of a darting, flashing movement characterised by a subtle grace bringing to bear a strongly evocative influence on the eye, hence a movement which strikes. Perhaps the impression of undulating movement created here is further enhanced by the two sets of alliteration in the final compound of the fourth *pāda*, *ca... ca... ca... and ...lalo ...lai*.

What the reader/hearer is confronted with is the suggestive effect of two different forms of movement. In terms of their respective ideational contexts they invite quite contrary evaluations, coming together not only in the bounded confines of a single poem, but also in the same conceptual space. To use the word “coming together” is probably to understate both the poet’s intent and the strength of the interaction being communicated. It is certainly better to use the word “clash” as this conveys the shock experienced on seeing women’s eyes and is consistent with the suddenness of this vision as evinced by the two temporal particles followed by the emphatic particle *eva*. For the purpose of the present paper what is fundamental is the bringing together of two vaguely defined visual images both apparently existing on different levels of perceptible reality, yet correlating easily because they embrace both the act of seeing and the quality of movement and attraction. Of these two images, the first lays most claim to symbolising that connection with a vision of reality called elsewhere in Bhartṛhari’s poems *tattva*, *Brahma* or *jñāna*⁵, a reality characterised both by an indefinable essence and an unchanging nature, beyond time and space as it were. Here though its temporal qualities are certainly explicated in its visual expression conveyed by *sphurati*. As for the second image it traditionally symbolises only a provisional form of reality, ephemeral in the truest sense in being dominated by the

5. See No.6 in the ungrouped section of Kosambi’s synoptic edition; VŚ 178, ŚŚ 83, 88, 108.

senses. For this it cannot escape being evaluated ultimately by the ascetic tradition as non-reality and as representing an insight considerably inferior to the first. Nonetheless, it is more powerful, if not alluring, than the first, a conclusion that jumps at us if we consider the nature of the two finite verbs found in this poem. Of these *sphurati* is active, yet it is intransitive and is certainly not the result of any kind of deliberate or intentional act. The second *tāḍyate* is passive and acts upon the possessor of the “light of clear discrimination”, who is a passive receptor of the vision of flashing eyes, symbolic of the ephemeral reality dominated by the senses.

Movement and Solidity

If we leave the ŚŚ where the idea of ephemerality is more focused upon than in the other two *śatakas* and enter the VŚ we can discern a much stronger emphasis on movement in contrast with its opposite – solidity and stillness. Yet we continue to note the highly ambiguous attitude towards both solidity and movement from the perspective of each. The poem I analyse now replicates the broad conceptual boundaries of Bhartṛhari's thought world and raises all of the problems countenanced in the last sentence.

*bhogā meghavitānamadhyavilasatsaudāminīcañcalā
 āyurvāyuvighaṭṭitābhraṇaṭalilīnāmbuvad bhaṅguram /
 lolā yauvanalālānā tanubhṛtāmityākalayya drutaṃ
 yoge dhairyasamādhisiddhisulabhe buddhiṃ vidadhvaṃ budhāḥ // VŚ 178*

For humans sense pleasures flicker
 Like lightning flashing amidst the canopy of cloud,
 Life is fragile like water clinging
 To the wind buffeted cloud canopy.
 The beauty of youth is transitory.
 Reflecting rapidly on this,
 Place your mind in concentration
 Easily obtained by those perfected in contemplation and firmness.

The message is obvious: the opposition between the senses and yoga is to the conceptual opposition between surface fragility and deep solidity. But as with all of Bhartṛhari's poems this fundamental theme, one running so clearly through such a large part of the thought to which he was susceptible (because it so aptly summarizes much found within the broad parameters of ancient Indian thought), is treated with a subtlety that becomes apparent only after an extended reading.

In our analysis let us move from the specific to the general. If we begin with terms denoting movement, the following correspondences appear: movement is initially (in the first *pāda*) portrayed as visual, a strategy we find so frequently in Bhartṛhari's poetry, pointing yet again towards the problem of epistemology. The cloud denotes some kind of broad homogenous (*vitāna*) mass broken up by the flash of light that creates a visual distinction in this mass. Lightning moves unsteadily and flashes, though it is not the same flash of lightning, but separate flashes occurring intermittently. Movement in both space and time is suggested; the two Sanskrit words employed to describe this movement are *cañcalā* and *vilasat*. Among other things both can have the meaning of "quivering, vibrating" (Cf. Passi⁶ *guizzano* [*cañcalā*] and *ammicca* "wink" [*vilasat*]). Of these *vilasat* might be regarded as visual, whereas *cañcalā* has a temporal and spatial sense.

The second *pāda* does not use a simile of space or time. Instead, in using *bhaṅgura*, a derivative of the root *bhañj*, the poet focusses on the lack of solidity of a concept that can, of course, be measured in temporal terms, even though that is not the prime sense here. Fragility [Passi, "frail"] is possibly the best translation to adopt, for the hold onto the cloud by the "bubbles of water" is indeed tenuous when the cloud is buffeted by the wind. That is, they drop off and disappear. The kind of solidity which may appear to be present is quickly shown under pressure to be both transient and fanciful.

The third *pāda* sustains the evocation of a feeling of transience by evoking yet another perpetual theme in Bhartṛhari's poems – the anguish arising from the loss of youth. Here the relevant words are characterised by a sense of semantic ambiguity. Recognition of this

6. A. PASSI, *Bhartṛhari. Sulla saggezza mondana, sull'amore e sulla rinuncia*, Milano, 1989, p.197.

ambiguity is the point of the entire paper, that is the sense in which words for movement, transience, change and fragility overlap into a range of semantic fields that themselves are easily classifiable into the dominant ideologies forming a kind of meta-frame in Bhartṛhari's poetry. *Lola* operates in several semantic fields covering movement, restlessness, agitation, transience and desire, even if the basic meaning of the verbal root relates to movement. Although it is a noun *lālana* "caress" (Kale⁷ translates it in a strongly euphemistic manner by "happiness") also brings with it a sense of sensuous movement in the broad meaning of "to sport, dally".

How do we correlate the suggestions of movement developed in all three *pādas* and are we entitled to ask how it relates to the unity established by the human body if it is correct to take this as the object of each of the three sentences? This requires us to draw together sense pleasures, life (as a kind of abstraction) and the caress of youth as the defining features of embodied humans. Each of these in its own way is defined with one of the terms we are focussing upon in this paper. I have listed each of them below with its appropriate adjectival qualification:

<i>bhogā</i>	<i>cañcalā</i>
<i>āyur</i>	<i>bhaṅguram</i>
<i>yauvana</i>	<i>lolā</i>

Is each of these meant to be understood as a kind of totality that is fragile and transient in its own right? And if so, are we being invited to combine them into some kind of larger entity that transcends whilst somehow uniting each of them? That they are a unity is clear because of the injunction that *ityākatayya drutaṃ*, for the wise undertake yogic practice when they consider what is being described in the first three lines. The question remains: what are they being asked to see? Are the three elements communicated in the first three *pādas* meant to designate a symbolic statement of how existence should be regarded from the renouncer's view point? Obviously this does not communi-

7. M.R. KALE, *The Nīti and Vairāgya Śatakas*, Seventh Edition, New Delhi, 1971, p. 32 of the translation.

cate any kind of firm entity capable of being regarded as foundational in any sense? That is, if the cultural subtext Bhartṛhari works from is that of the renouncer practising *vairāgya*, alone the *ātman* has permanence and stability, qualities wrongly attributed to the body and the mind by those who do not possess the knowledge leading to *vairāgya*. But that is, of course, an obvious point. So what is Bhartṛhari saying to us? It is clear that he is contrasting some kind of stability and firmness, as expressed in the fourth *pāda*, with the kind of utter transience and movement expressed in a quite undisguised manner in the first three *pādas*.

However this is not a simple transience and/or insubstantiality. In the first place it is complicated by the use of the three adjectives *cañcalā*, *bhaṅguram* and *lolā*, each overlapping with the other in the broadest possible framework in that they are semantically related in any *vairāgyic* sub-text where they can easily be taken as synonyms both for a single aspect of *saṃsāra* as well as for *saṃsāra* as a whole. A further shift is made by the conspicuous use of cloud symbolism. In *pāda* 1 the cloud is an homogenous mass, expressed clearly in the words *vitāna* and *paṭālī*, translatable as canopy, where *vitāna* is broken up by the lightning strike and in 2 where it is liable to collapse into its basic constituents – drops of water. It is hard to conclude that the cloud itself is not being utilised as a metaphor for *saṃsāra* where its apparent solidity is quickly exposed as being transparently false.

This is only the most obvious device used in this poem to begin building up the picture of a tentative reality that can easily be shown as collapsible under any kind of sustained pressure. What do we make of the other strategies used by the poet? In the first instance there is the repetition of the prefix *vi* with its semantic resonance of “distinction, division”. Four occurrences of this prefix can be listed:

- 1 *-vitāna- -vilāsat-*
- 2 *-vighaṭṭita -*
- 4 *vidadhvaṃ budhāḥ*

That this prefix is repeated four times in this poem is a fact of significance in its own right, but how does each lexical item which the prefix modifies influence the overall meaning of the poem and the

idea of "fragmentation" we continually associate with this prefix in Bhartṛhari's poems? The root *tan* expresses the general sense of "to extend, stretch" and in the compound where it occurs the use of *vi* seems to be pleonastic if we take *vitāna* to mean "great extent" or "awning canopy". The *vi* of *vilasat* "flashing, shining, gleaming" in this context also appears to fall into the same category, even if the vision it evokes in this poem is one that succeeds in emphasizing the idea of "distinction" or "difference". Of the third root *ghaṭṭ*, the meaning is precisely in conformity with the sense of "distinction" in so far as *vighaṭṭita* designates the buffeting responsible for causing the seemingly solid canopy of the cloud to break up into individual drops of rain. Finally, the finite verb *vidadhvan* contains within it a meaning quite the opposite of the sense that *vi* has when it is used here with *las* and *ghaṭṭ*. It can only designate the act of focussing the mind in concentration, that is, shutting out all of the extraneous influences brought in by the senses and their objects, in order to establish some kind of mental unity that exists without any kind of distinction – obviously the state which is the *ātman*.

The most semantically striking sense of *vi* operates as a kind of secondary suggestion. Of the four uses of *vi*, only one – *vighaṭṭita* – is obviously semantically consistent with the basic meaning of the *upāsarga vi*. Two of the others – *vidhadvam* and *vitāna* – have a meaning quite the opposite of the habitual use of the *upāsarga* and in that sense produce the kind of lexical jarring so frequent in Bhartṛhari's poetry. Images of totality are confronted with words which in their most habitual use imply fragmentation. It is this confrontation that is as powerful a statement of fragmentation as are the three adjectives used in the first three *pādas*; each have their own singular meaning. The total image built up substantially reinforces and universalises the image of fragmentation captured in the ideas of movement, fragility and bodily change.

An abrupt change occurs following the inclusion of *iti*, here a marker of emphasis employed to break the poem into two sections and to emphasize that what precedes it is as much a verbal totality as a conceptual totality. What follows it designates both an epistemological practice and a means of evaluating the contents of what precedes it. The gerund *ākalayya* may designate a means of knowing that

involves the person capturing a single insightful glimpse of those elements of *saṃsāra* which have been abstracted into powerful symbols by both poets and religious thinkers. Once intuited for what they are these symbols and what they symbolise must be placed to one side and the intellect placed into a condition which, whilst not demolishing whatever defines *saṃsāra*, certainly excludes it. For what is included in the fourth *pāda* is quite the opposite of the contents of the first three *pādas*, and in two ways. In the first instance, it is much more difficult to conceptualise the intellect in visual terms than the graphic images of lightning, youth and rain clouds. Secondly, it contains the only finite verb in the sentence and conveys a precise action in a way evocative of a much more narrow and unemotional response to the images expressed in the first three *pādas*.

The action enjoined clearly implies the attainment of a kind of unity, irrespective of whether we should understand the locative sense of *yoga* as being “in” or “on”. Of the latter word the meaning is unambiguous in this context, especially since it is connected with *buddhi*. But note the idea of firmness denoted by *dhairya* and of unity implied by *saṃādhi*, to which we note the confluence of the root *dhā* in *vi/dhā*.

ākalayya drutaṃ

yoge dhairyasamādhisiddhisulabhe buddhiṃ vidadhvaṃ budhāḥ

When strengthened by their prefixes both are metaphors of fragmentation, but fragmentation of what? The best answer is that they denote the fragmentation of some kind of totality, whether this be *ātman*, *nirvāṇa* or the totality of intuitive vision associated with some kind of liberating experience.

Another poem from the *VŚ* develops similar themes. Here is poem 192:

*āyuh kallolalolaṃ katipayadivasasthāyinī yauvanaśrīr
arthāḥ saṃkalpakalpā ghanasamayataḍidvibhramā bhogapūrāḥ /
kaṇṭhāsleṣopagūḍhaṃ tadapi ca na ciraṃ yat priyābhiḥ praṇītaṃ
brahmaṇyāsaktacittā bhavata bhavabhayāmbhodhipāraṇi tarītum //*

Life is a wave-like movement.

Youth's beauty remains only for a few days.

Wealth is like a momentary thought.

Satisfaction from sense pleasures flashes as lightning in the rainy season.
 An embrace on the neck desired by lovely women,
 Even that too does not last.
 Stick your minds on Brahma
 To cross the fearful ocean of existence.

This is very close to a restatement of VŚ 178 with its demonstration of the traditional boundaries of thought in ancient India. It is both original and marked with a high degree of poetic virtuosity. Life conceived as an abstract *phenomenon*, the beauty of youth, wealth, satisfaction of sense pleasures and sensuality: collectively these constitute *bhavabhayāmbhodhi*, a frequent metaphor for *saṃsāra*. But is this a kind of solidity, even if just a conceptual solidity? The occurrence of water symbolism in the poem invites us to envision the sea as a kind of unity which it is the task of the poet and the readers of the poems to understand as some kind of equivalence to human life contrived only as a set of abstractions. The ocean obviously speaks for itself (but does the particular compound *ambho+dhi* have any significance?), leaving us with the task of correlating the other images of liquidity with it. Each *pāda* contributes to building up this image. In the first, one of the dominant metaphors is the wave or billow, and when compounded with *lola* – denotative of movement in a broad sense – also brings with it a strongly sensual tinge. It is not at all easy to give this any specificity in interpretation. We could well be justified in assuming that the poet is using this as a broad concept to both counterbalance the metaphor of *saṃsāra* in the fourth *pāda* of the poem and to provide a frame into which more specific images of movement can be inserted with the purpose of building up a highly composite figure of life as movement. This process of filling is begun in the second *pāda* where we find the compound *ghanasamayataḍidvibhramā*, very similar in meaning to the compound in 178 (*meghavitānamadhyavilasatsaudāminīcāñcalā*) and where the motif of liquidity is implied in the cloud. The parallel can be drawn out even further when we consider the relation of *bhoga* to each of the compounds evoking cloud symbolism. Sense pleasures are striking but hit us only intermittently. One cannot see any liquid imagery in the third *pāda* unless we take *āśleṣa* in this sense, but that would be focussing on the meaning of “to adhere” as

“to stick” in the very way we can observe in respect of *āśakta* in the following line, even in the face of the obvious opposition between the objects of what one should be attached to as designating different forms of attachment.

Apart from the obvious cosmogonic implications of water and the ocean, how are we able to interpret the symbolism of liquid in its purpose of establishing an image of fragile totality? Oceanic symbolism is used to convey the idea of the vastness of existence and the difficulty contained in moving from a state of *duḥkha* to *mokṣa*. A striking quality of liquid is that it moves. Further, that it presents an apparently solid surface which can easily be penetrated. Yet Bhartṛhari never, unless deliberately, employs symbols in a crude sense as this would imply. Rather his portrayal of levels of reality in the way I am trying to present it here is almost always in terms of visually and aurally perceptible devices. Above all it is the eyes that comprehend surface reality in a vision that is gained in an ephemeral manner, the mind through meditation that seeks a deeper reality capable of being named only with words having no visual referent. Of course, the eyes are not entirely deceptive and they are capable of realising that the surface upon which they gaze is neither opaque nor solid, a realisation opening up the possibility of there being several levels of reality capable of simultaneous observation and dissolution.

The problem confronting us in this poem can be expressed in the following words: how can objects (images?) operating on several levels of comprehension be taken up to present a single image of a perceptible reality that is multiple and not unified, even conceding that the latter is a possibility as the fourth *pāda* of the poem signals? The images of transience and change appeal to the different senses. *Āyur* and *artha* seek a response primarily from the mind as they are hard to pin down with any other sense. Mind is a sense for Bhartṛhari. The splendour of youth appeals primarily to the visual faculties, though as an abstract quality in Bhartṛhari’s poetry, it also appeals to the mind. The embrace of woman denoted in the third *pāda* evokes both touch and emotion, hence it too has a dual resonance in both the mind and the organ of touch. Finally, and separate from all the others, is the attachment to Brahman, that appeals to a particular aspect of the mental faculty – the *citta* – which in all probability should be distinguish-

shed from the *manas* as the co-ordinating organ of the senses and hence of the emotions.

The Problem of the Nītiśataka

The *Nītiśataka* (*NŚ*) always emerges as a special case in the study of the *ŚT*, primarily because it does not relate easily to the contents of the other two *śatakas*. This becomes most apparent when it is considered that the *Śṛṅgāra* and the *Vairāgya* stand in direct opposition to each other within the parameters of indigenous classification systems such as *pravṛtti* (= *Śṛṅgāra*) and *nivṛtti* (= *Vairāgya*), or the *caturvarga* where the correspondences of *kāma* with *Śṛṅgāra* and *mokṣa* with *Vairāgya* require no explanation⁸. Accordingly, one can interpret each of these two *śatakas* in relation to the other, as if both were differently composed to mirror each other's values and to bring out the ambiguities present in the pristine positions of their underlying ideologies insofar as these are depicted in the *Upaniṣads*, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Dharmaśāstras*.

Not so with the *NŚ*. It evokes values that are not logically the opposite of those defining either of the other two *śatakas*, nor does it concord even closely with *pravṛtti* (though it is much closer to it than it is to *nivṛtti*) and within the *trivarga* framework it contains elements of both *dharma* and *artha*. Rather it mirrors its own name and provides both practical advice pertaining to good, if highly pragmatic, conduct and portrays the abstract values behind these. It even goes further to explore what underlies even them, especially the inscrutability of fate and *karma*. Nonetheless, if we are, methodologically speaking, to regard the entire collection of poems as preserving certain kinds of unity of style and content across its length and not just as a collection of individual poems, it will be necessary to locate preoccupations about the different registers of reality and the subject of the ephemeral occurring in the *ŚT* and *VŚ*, in the *NŚ* as well.

8. For some commentary on this problem see BAILEY, *Bhartṛhari's Critique...*

We do not find in the *NŚ* the kinds of concentrated vocabulary denoting that specific aspect of visual reality described as intermittent flashing or of an aural reality signalled by the sounds of anklets clinking in some kind of random sequence. Nonetheless, the *NŚ* is not devoid of poems capable of being read as messages about levels of reality, seen from an epistemological perspective, in a similar manner to those depicted in much less ambiguous language in the other two *śatakas*. The usual pattern of content in such poems is for the poet to enumerate a list of qualities or things and then either sum them up with one quality that embraces them all or to undercut them by showing their impotence in the face of some other factor. Thus a collection of parts are confronted in a variety of ways with a unity. In the analysis of the collection, the unifying factor and the relation between them, we can find ambiguities similar to those present in the two other *śatakas* and discern the same propensity to explore levels of reality.

Consider first *NŚ* 21.

*kvacidbhūmau śayyā kvacidapi ca paryāṅkaśayanaṃ
kvacic chākāhāraḥ kvacidapi ca śālyodanaruciḥ /
kvacitkanthādhārī kvacidapi ca divyāambaradharo
manasvī kāryārthī gaṇayati na duḥkhaṃ na ca sukham //*

Sometimes his bed is on the ground,
Sometimes he sleeps on a couch.
Sometimes his food is vegetables,
Sometimes choice boiled rice.
Sometimes he wears rags,
Sometimes he is garbed in celestial garments.
The man of integrity who seeks to achieve his goal
Reckons neither sorrow nor happiness.

What strikes one immediately on reading this poem is the very high level of repetition of sound (*śabdālaṅkāra*) and morphology. Besides the six occurrences of the locative particle *kvacit* (cf. *ŚŚ* 89), there is a further repetition in the placing of *api ca* after each of these words where they occur in the second half of the first three *pādas*. This repetition and distinction is especially significant if it is considered that

both *api* (should we take this as giving further indefiniteness to that already created by the addition of *cit* to *kva*?) and *ca* are grammatically redundant here, though certainly not semantically redundant. We can assume the inclusion of *cit* and *api* is designed to place emphasis on the discreteness and the randomness of each act in a temporal sense. Even in spite of the minor difference it makes in the use of *kva-cit*, the repetition of this word acts as a kind of unified conceptual frame enclosing everything else in the first three lines.

How much variation is really present in these lines? In truth the variation is quite restricted and applies only to three sets of oppositions pertaining respectively to three separate objects: beds, food and clothes. Collectively these sum up the totality of life concerns for the ascetic or the "man of integrity" as we translate the word *manasvin*.

<i>bhūmau śayyā</i>	<i>paryāṅkaśayanam</i>
<i>śākāhāraḥ</i>	<i>śālyodanaruciḥ</i>
<i>kanthādhārī</i>	<i>divyāmbaradharo</i>

There is substantial variety in the particular morphology that is being used, though this variation is severely mitigated by the high degree of restrictiveness governing the diversity of content in these lines. This is expressed in the following way: each of the six nominal expressions can be divided into two series of three sets of contraries, such that we are not dealing with six discrete objects but three. In truth, they can be reduced to one dichotomy: that contrast between the peripatetic ascetic and the stationary man of means, probably a king. But the restrictiveness is also stressed by the deliberate absence of finite verbal forms, instead showing a clear preference for verbal nouns and five *bahuvrīhi* compounds. What this regularity induces is a sharper perception of distinction between the locative particles as one group and the nominal expressions as the other group.

The most substantial opposition, yet the idea that provides a point of unity for the whole poem, is the final verse where the dichotomous position stated in the first three *pādas* is shown to be quite erroneous. Indeed it is seen to be quite irrelevant from the perspective of the *manasvin* who need not be placed in either of the groups characterised by the qualifications listed in the first three *pādas*. In the final *pāda*

the phrase *na gaṇayati* implies a clear refusal to view existence within the dichotomous terms so strongly stressed in the first three *pādas*. Everything is reduced to the basic opposition of *duḥkha* and *sukha* and they effectively operate as two strongly evaluative terms of universal significance across virtually every school of thought that would have existed in Bhartṛhari's time. More specifically, in the present poem they consolidate the evaluations already present in the dichotomies defined in the first three *pādas*, but reduce them to their basics as they must in this poem of prime philosophical import. How often in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Purāṇas* is the sentiment of indifference towards *duḥkha* and *sukha* expressed?

We should note finally that the last *pāda* of the poem contains the only finite verb in the entire poem, as if emphasizing that this refusal to see anything in terms of dichotomy is the only act of significance. All the others, indicated by an absence of a finite verb, are merely incidental and in their incidentality give further reflection to the indifference occasioned by the refusal to apply evaluative categories to events. This appears to be an absolute imperative, at least in the sense that it assumes the validity of the renunciatory world-view and does not question this as it does so frequently, if mainly implicitly, in the *Vairāgyaśataka*. It is a wholly confident statement and requires us to defer the epistemological concern and focus simply on the relationship between whole and parts. In short, it is clear that we are dealing here with an opposition between a whole and a plurality, where the whole is expressed as a perception of the nature of reality.

Poem No. 25 in the *NŚ* offers a similar perspective to the above noted verse, whilst utilising entirely different content.

*jātiryātu rasātalaṃ guṇagaṇas tasyāpyadho gacchatām
 śīlaṃ śailataṭāt patatvabhijanaḥ saṃdahyatām vahninā /
 śaurye vairiṇi vajram āśu nipatatvartho' stu naḥ kevalam
 yenaikena vinā guṇās tṛṇalavaprāyāḥ samastā ime*

Let lineage go to hell.

Let good qualities go even further below.

Let moral conduct fall from the mountain slope.

Let good breeding be burnt by fire.

Let the thunderbolt instantly fall on heroic enmity.

Let us only have money.
 Without that alone,
 All these qualities are worth a blade of grass.

This verse has many similarities with the first one from the *NŚ* just analysed, differing mainly in its complete lack of religious referents. However, unlike it, where the conjoined world view centred on *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti* is accurately reflected, this one stands firmly within the context of the kind of realism one would expect to find in the *Arthaśāstra*. Nonetheless it does conform in structure to the previous poem, specifically in dealing with sets of individual qualities, all opposed as a group to one single quality that makes or breaks their worth, that offers an evaluation as universal as the one in the previous poem. This is signalled, as we would expect, in the last *pāda* of the poem, where the words *yenaikena*, referring to the *arthaḥ* of the previous *pāda*, contrast exactly with the word *samastā* at the end of the line. The stress on singularity is strengthened even further by the occurrence of *artha* in the nominative singular in conjunction with the particle *kevalam* (alone).

Each of the individual items listed here can be treated as an individual concept, yet simultaneously form a group because all are qualities regarded as admirable in themselves, befitting of the kind of *nīti* which gives the subject to this *śataka*. Let me list them:

<i>jāti</i> = good birth	(inherent)
<i>guṇagaṇa</i> = general good qualities	(acquired)
<i>śīlam</i> = good conduct	(acquired)
<i>abhijanaḥ</i> = good birth	(inherent)
<i>śaurya</i> = bravery in battle	(acquired)

Each of these is, of course, extremely general and could apply in Sanskrit literature as recognisable qualities to any male member of the two highest classes. Clearly we are dealing with stereotypes, effective because they are so comprehensive in their coverage of social aspirations and values. Despite their denotation by individual words they overlap substantially, *jāti* and *abhijana* being virtually identical, *śaurya* being a specific class orientated expression of *śīlam*. Nonetheless, they are included in a list here on the diachronic axis

(although it is difficult to discover any kind of patterning in their sequentiality) of the poem and are distinguished both by the verb accompanying them and the object that effects them. In each case the verb with which they are used is in the imperative and implies movement and destruction, the latter either through a fall or some kind of dissolution:

jātiryātu
guṇagaṇas ...gacchatām
śīlaṃ ... patatv
abhijanaḥ saṃdahyatām
vajram āśu nipatatv

Of these only the fourth denotes any action other than downward movement and this is strengthened in each case by the use either of the ablative case⁹ or a word indicative of lowness (*adhas*). The imperative is best taken here to represent a kind of future tense, with a tinge of compulsion added on as a means of indicating the inevitability of the fate of good qualities devoid of money. The verbs literally translate as “to go (down) to (accusative)”, “to go (down) to” (indeclinable with genitive), “to fall” (ablative), “to be consumed” (intransitive, passive), “to fall” (locative). In this sense the idea of transitoriness is unambiguously evoked, but what is striking and attracts our fixed attention is that traditional *nīti* values are thrown on their head. Spatial oppositions here are much more important than temporal ones, indicating that the situation being described in the poem is one that transcends time boundaries. The alternation between the high and low points as exemplified by the high position and corresponding fall of the qualities that indicate traditional forms of highly esteemed behaviour is contrasted sharply with the position of wealth which remains as a constant, reflected in the use of the verb *as*. It has a clear stative sense in relation to all the other verbs, each with their own strong sense of dynamism.

9. How significant is the alliteration of the sound *āt* (*jātiryātu rasātalam*) in the first half of the first *pāda*?

In the temporal contrast between the one and the many we do not perceive an opposition between part and a whole so much as one between governing and subsidiary concepts. This is even given focus in the poem itself by the space allocated to the individual components in contrast to that given to the section dealing with wealth. The relationship between part and whole is an evaluative one, though of a different kind than the one in the previous poem. It is negative in its assessment of the value of a virtuous life led without wealth, whereas the previous poem is much closer to the renunciatory line in both its language and its abrogation of any kind of evaluation in the face of an acceptance of indifference towards opposites. Even so, from a structural point of view both poems portray a picture of a reality where the parts are related to a whole, a portrayal emerging both from the content of the poem, the syntactical arrangement and the positioning of the last line of the poem as the governing one for the purposes of interpretation of the whole.

The Ephemeral

I have presented only a small selection of poems from the *ŚT* that bring out the related subjects of the various registers of reality and one of the ways in which these levels of reality might be organised from an epistemological perspective. In no sense have I exhausted the subject, having been highly selective in the poems utilised and omitting many others that could have been used and scarcely even touching upon an exegesis of those poems where verbal roots such as √*sphuṭ*, √*spaṣ*, √*lal*, √*lul* and √*jñā* are found. All of these have a direct bearing on the present subject. Of the registers of reality there are two principal ones: the ephemeral is the most visible as it is comprehensible by all the senses and because of this is both the most tantalising and uncontrollable. The second is only to be achieved by the control of the mind, by the blocking out of the ephemeral. It is as if it were a given that will emerge naturally when the play things of the senses have evaporated. Moreover it is a unity defying the constant plurality defining the manner in which we see the external world. In this sense the unity that either unites or extinguishes the parts brings the idea of

the two epistemological registers into conjunction with the treatment of reality in terms of the relation between the parts and an encompassing whole that is such a strong theme throughout the *ŚT*.

The study of this subject in Bhartṛhari's poems certainly does not finish here. For the most interesting problem is to understand how the two levels of reality are ultimately evaluated in relation to each other. Bhartṛhari was too subtle a thinker just to present the two registers in a manner so powerfully and axiomatically represented in ancient Indian culture. Consistent with his gentle iconoclastic hand he often contrasts the vivacity, the vitality and the allure of the ephemeral with the fragility and the parsimony of the absolute, all that knowledge which declares the ephemeral to be ephemeral and warns the spiritually minded person of the dangers of seeing solidity where there is porosity. Yet how can one live without this? So the poet constantly declaims whilst pointing out the constant propensity to fall back from the solidity and stability of the absolute into the tenacity and fragility of the ephemeral. Surely this entangles the two levels of reality in a way not favoured by so many of the powerful figures prior to Bhartṛhari's time who sought so vociferously to separate them.